

AMERICA THROUGH THE SOVIET LOOKING-GLASS

World Peace at the Mercy of Stereotypes and Delusions

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EUROPE has never been able quite to make up its mind about America, perhaps because it has never been able quite to make up its mind about itself; lauding America in the spirit of Rousseau for having escaped the tyranny of Old World civilization, and depreciating it in the spirit of Burke for its lack of culture and tradition; praising the limited authority of the state over the free American individual in the spirit of Adam Smith, and condemning the social slavery of American capitalism in the spirit of Marx. Because America was not a new world but only a new continent of the old earth, because it was not only a moral idea but a material fact, it has been all these things together.

Russia has been no exception to this ambivalent attitude, as is made quite clear in a recently published book by Max M. Laserson, *The American Impact on Russia, 1784-1917*. We can see in the example of Alexander Herzen how American liberty attracted

THE sense of frustration and bewilderment experienced by citizens of the democratic nations in the face of Russian propaganda and "diplomacy" arises, MARTIN GREENBERG suggests, from the fact that Russian political behavior, far from being the product of cold realism and calculation that it is often thought to be, stems from deep and apparently chronic psychological confusions. The Russians believe what they say; this is the most discouraging part in the whole dark picture. Mr. Greenberg documents his view from two recently published books, Max M. Laserson's *The American Impact on Russia, 1784-1917* (Macmillan) and *The Soviet Image of the United States* by Frederick C. Barghoorn (Harcourt, Brace). Mr. Greenberg has written literary and political articles for *COMMENTARY*, *Partisan Review*, the *Nation*, and various other periodicals. He was born in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1918, and attended the University of Michigan and Columbia University.

Russian liberals, and how American capitalism, especially in the rank form in which it flourished after the Civil War, repelled them. With the growth of anti-capitalist sentiment and thought, the negative view of America came to predominate. In Russia, Slavophile and Marxist united in condemning American "materialism." America had seemed to offer the world a chance to wipe the slate clean; it was humanity's great second chance to start anew, a *tabula rasa* on which to write a better story than Europe's history of injustice—"Thus in the beginning all the world was America," John Locke had written. But then all of the "old crap," in Marx's inelegant phrase, seemed to have been revived in America, and Europe turned to socialism. Today the influence of socialism in Europe is such that America, in spite (or perhaps in part because) of UNRRA, the Marshall Plan, and Point Four, is regarded with churlish and suicidal suspicion. French intellectuals, in their few rags and tatters of a late-discovered Marxism, make an ignorant parade of their anti-Americanism, and the British Labor party solemnly assures its respective rank and file that American democracy is in many ways the equal of the British. That the day should have arrived when Englishmen crave reassurance that America is as democratic a country as their own!

Even the witty and acute historian A. J. P. Taylor, conceiving it the duty of the good European to oppose the United States and Russia together, maintains the ungrateful fiction that this country's present decisive influence in Western European affairs is foreign domination on a par with Russian domination of Eastern Europe; we Britons, Taylor says in a *bon mot* more pert than accurate, should be America's Tito. England with American assistance having got back on its economic feet, at least temporarily, the

aid being furnished it under the ERP was suspended at the Labor government's request; no doubt Mr. Taylor considers this a blow struck in the cause of English Titoism and is awaiting America's counterblow in the form of an invasion of Great Britain by Coca-Cola bottles and Hollywood movies.

BOLSHEVISM, and Stalinism after it, have of course encouraged and exacerbated this hostile European attitude to America. In place of the almost metaphysical innocence that used in ages past to be attributed to America, Communism now imputes to it a frankly metaphysical depravity. The Soviet view of the United States, despite all the changes in the Communist line, has remained much the same, as we see in another recent book, *The Soviet Image of the United States*, by Frederick C. Barghoorn, and as Roosevelt might well have realized without thereby thinking to have jeopardized the alliance against Nazi Germany. A capitalist country in the last, imperialist, stage of degeneration, the United States can only follow a policy of aggressive war and foreign conquest—this is unalterable Communist dogma. Even in the struggle against Hitler, it was only the cloak of Soviet virtue thrown over the originally imperialist and reactionary conflict which sanctified it as progressive.

Yet the idea of America as the New World of possibility and promise still persists in the Russian admiration for American technology, and for the free and unceremonious "American style" in general; indeed, it was to an extent officially tolerated until the recent campaign against "cosmopolitanism." Mr. Barghoorn writes: "The admiration implicit in the Soviet program of 'overtaking and surpassing' America industrially and technically fostered respect for America. . . . In myriad ways, the Soviet people and even their highest leaders were daily engaged in imitating America."

It might be thought a hopeful sign that Soviet Russia takes America and American industrialism as its model and should want to imitate them. But apart from the fact

that Soviet industry adopts such practices as the speed-up when organized labor in the United States has largely succeeded in expelling it from American industry, this imitative zeal is more envious than emulous and indicates a highly dangerous Russian state of mind. Germany, like Russia half in and half out of Europe and the West, greatly admired England and the English style; the Kaiser having got rid of Bismarck, Germany then proceeded—in defiance of all military common sense and necessity—to build a Grand Fleet à l'anglaise with which to challenge and defeat the object of its admiration.

THE resemblance between Germany and Russia is indeed striking. It is not merely that the one was recently and the other is now a totalitarian country. (Here, indeed, Hitler learned from, and fell far below, Bolshevism: it is the party of the "masses," based on an ideology and ruled with an iron hand from above, that is the distinguishing institution of totalitarianism.) Both countries, outsiders, and for long centuries held in contempt by Europe for their backwardness and benightedness, labor under a feeling of inferiority, of awe, before the West; in Germany's case this is a feeling of national, and in Russia's of cultural, inferiority. Germany tried to make itself part of historical and not merely geographical Europe by conquering it; when Stalin told the Japanese ambassador during the period of the Nazi-Soviet Pact that Russia was an Asiatic country too, did his own words cause him any chagrin? And in each of the two countries it has been a provincial even among the provincials—Hitler the Austrian and Stalin the Georgian—who has best interpreted its envious aspirations.

Russia and Germany are linked not only by abstract analogy, but by the concrete historical fact of Marxism. Marx was in many ways a radical middle-class German nationalist of the *Aufklärung* full of admiration not untinged with envy for English industry ("capitalism"). He wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*, when England was the only great industrial nation: "It [the bourgeoisie]

has worked wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals. . . . The bourgeoisie in the scarcely one hundred years of its rule has created more imposing and colossal productive forces than have all the preceding generations together." His German aspirations to "overtake and surpass" Western Europe he clothed and sublimated in the cosmopolitan universals of Marxian socialism; this, with its Hegelian contempt for the "lower," bourgeois stage of democracy, thus lent itself with peculiar aptness to a Russian nationalism anxious to industrialize and assert itself without having first to submit to the slow, uncertain, and unaccustomed courses of political democracy. Today, the vast universals of Marxism rationalize and encourage Russia's immense expansion, as the narrow racist doctrines of Hitlerism rationalized (and limited) Nazi expansion.

This desire to rival and outdo the West is not, however, self-explaining, or explicable simply by the fact that Russia and Germany played for so long a role in history incommensurate with their size and potentialities. Behind this aggressiveness is fear. The two countries, lacking any great natural barriers to protect them from invasion, have served since time immemorial as battlefields for Europe. We have only the breasts of our soldiers, I remember Churchill quoting a German as having said, to oppose to foreign invaders. This fear is of course a much more important factor in Stalin's policy than it was in the policy of Imperial Germany and the Third Reich. The Kaiser and Hitler, with differences, were worried not so much about invasion as about German historical greatness; whereas I should say that Stalin is as fearful of America as he is anxious to "surpass" it.

Fear pure and simple, however, is not enough to explain the present assertiveness of the Soviet Union. If Russia were as afraid of the United States now as it was of Germany in 1939-1941, Stalin would treat this country with the same obsequiousness he showed to Hitler. As Mr. Barghoorn says, "Never did Soviet Russia accord to

any capitalist power as great a measure of co-operation as she offered to Nazi Germany during the Pact period." A fear made rash and audacious by the triumphs of the Red Army over the Wehrmacht, and by Russia's present commanding strategic position, helps to explain present Soviet policy. Russia is a land power, and it will not feel easy, given its past history and present paranoiac ideology, until it puts oceans between itself and capitalism. Even then Stalin, so much is he the victim of Russian Marxism, would nervously inveigh against the isolation and encirclement of Soviet Eurasia by imperialist navies.

Geographical barriers, it will be said, are not the only means by which a nation is made to feel reasonably secure from attack. This is true; there is diplomacy. By diplomacy, nations, though scheming and maneuvering against each other, also for long periods managed to allay their mutual fears and antagonisms and keep the peace. But diplomacy is preeminently a European thing about which the Soviet Union and the United States share much the same opinion. In Soviet eyes it is bourgeois trickery upon which they place not a particle of reliance; and in American eyes it is still Old World skulduggery. Constitutional limitation of the American Executive's freedom to negotiate with foreign states, and American public opinion, limit our diplomacy for the most part to "open covenants, openly arrived at." This has kept the history of our international relations free of most of those sordid bargains which so plentifully patch the pages of European diplomacy. On the other hand it imposes a characteristically American, high moral tone upon our foreign policy and actions which Europeans, and especially the British, call clumsiness and lack of tact. At a time when diplomacy might accomplish much, the historic characters of the two powers confronting each other in the world today render most of its exertions vain.

IT WOULD be a mistake to think that Stalin does not believe the Marxist accusations

he makes against America. What else does he know but this Marxism, the rationale and justification of the Soviet system, without which he would feel, both personally and as the national leader, as untutored and inept as—the son of a Georgian shoemaker. When the United States disarmed, Stalin did not, in the anxious conviction that the dialectic of the development of capitalism, though ultimately promising its downfall, immediately threatened Russia's existence; when the United States rearms against a threatening Russia, Stalin and his bureaucracy regard this only as proof—if that were needed—of their original conviction. They are nobody's country cousin, they will have us know, to be taken in by the tricks of a decadent West. A disarmed and fatuous America gave Russian imperialism opportunities exceeding its fondest dreams; and yet it is a question how far it is possible today to "deter" the Soviet Union by arming, when what we look on as a deterrent they regard, in a cold and impersonal hysteria, as an impossible aggravation of the dangers menacing them. Hitler was able to keep Stalin in a state of frightened subservience up to the very moment of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the Russian dictator having been too fearful to act even when warned in advance by Roosevelt and Churchill—here again he suspected "Anglo-American provocation"; we, however, cannot hope to intimidate Stalin in the way that Hitler did; long before we should have attained anything like Nazi Germany's military strength and strategic position vis-à-vis Russia—if that were possible, and our intention—war would have broken out.

Russian sympathy for America, Mr. Barghoorn notes, is strongest in the Soviet lower classes. (This most un-Marxist state of affairs is complemented by the fact that pro-Sovietism in this country is a middle-class phenomenon.) It ultimately derives from the old image of America which even Stalinism cannot completely efface, supported by recollections of the American relief missions to the Soviet Union in the 20's (a form of

imperialist intervention that the Soviet government of course never mentions), and by the limited acquaintance gained of American ways from the presence of relatively large numbers of Americans on Soviet soil during the war. Thus the two conceptions, negative and positive, that Europe has entertained of America are equally grounds for official Soviet apprehensions: America threatens Russia not only externally as a predatory capitalist power, but also internally as a subversive libertarian influence. Marxian socialism, with its vision of a world purged of all the "old crap," had been an America of the spirit to which some of the best souls of European liberalism emigrated. The wardens of the Russian prison house thus must and do claim this prison house to be the true America, erecting around the Soviet Union an insurmountable wall to preserve this hugest of the Soviet lies; for that material America which Russian and European spirituality have always professed to find too materialistic, would, if a comparison were permitted, at once expose the moral pretensions of the Russian America of the spirit.

THE object and the effect of Leninism, much more so than Marxism, was to confound all the bourgeois (and now socialist) democratic nations in the same imperialist stew without distinction; in this Lenin was assisted by his own deep ignorance of Europe and America. The idea of America that the Soviet government imposes on itself and its people, and attempts to impose on the world, is indiscriminate and vulgar—"Wall Street"—and further and further removed from the reality. How far removed, can only be gathered with any immediacy not from the abstractions of politics, but from such a thing as Churchill's description of the arrangements made by Molotov and his party for their safety during the former Russian Foreign Minister's visit to England in the spring of 1942: "On arrival the Russians had asked at once for keys to all the bedrooms. These were provided with some difficulty and thereafter our guests always

kept their doors locked. When the staff at Chequers succeeded in getting in to make the beds they were disturbed to find pistols under the pillows. . . . Molotov's room had been thoroughly searched by his police officers. . . . The bed was the object of particular attention; the mattresses were all prodded in case of infernal machines, and the sheets and blankets were rearranged by the Russians so as to leave an opening in the middle of the bed out of which the occupant could spring at a moment's notice, instead of being tucked in. At night a revolver was laid out beside his dressing gown and his dispatch case."

If these precautions were taken at a time when Russia and England were in wartime alliance, how, one must ask, does Vishinsky on Long Island manage to knit up the rav-eled sleeve of Soviet care? Dare he ever nod at all?

From this significant glimpse into the night-time existence of Soviet bureaucrats we can gather how Marxism, which in its

author's hands was a means to grasp reality the better, has changed into its opposite and now serves to conjure up the xenophobic spooks haunting ministerial slumber. The last of the great thinkers of the Enlightenment has fathered an obscurantism the like of which has hardly been seen, the doctrine that thought to conquer the dialectic by consummating it only serving as another illustration of its workings. The chief victim of this obscurantism is its architect. Stalin is as deluded about America as Molotov was about his English host, and is ready at any moment to spring out of his specially made-up Kremlin bed into the dangerous Western world in which he feels himself to be only a visitor, firing the pistol he keeps under his pillow.

Bolshevism, which so confidently presumed to instruct the bourgeoisie in their own true interests, by its ignorance of America and the West, by its failing grasp on reality, brings ever closer the war that will surely spell its own downfall.